

JOHN RAWN

Prominent Citizen

BY
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Author of *The Mississippi Bubble*; 84-40 or Fight

Illustrations by
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"That's what my father always said! Your career, your life! Where does your wife come in?"

"You come in precisely where you say you want to come in, Grace. We get what we earn in this world. If you leave me and take up a life which I can't share, if you leave my house and don't care for what I can give you—why there's not much left to talk about as to where you come in. You come in here. I belong over there."

"You're selfish! All men are, I think."

"I'm not going to argue about that in the least, Grace, except to say that the Rawn half of you can't see anything but its own part of the world. It wasn't the Rawn half of you that I married. You were different, then. You're not much like your mother, Grace! And I married the part of you that was like your mother. She was a good woman, and a good wife."

"You must not speak of her!"

"Oh, yes, I must, and I shall when I like. It's all in evidence. There's the record." He nodded toward the two dim figures at the other end of the gallery. "She's very beautiful, yes, very beautiful!" His eyes lingered on the figure of Virginia Rawn, faintly outlined, cool in satin and lace.

"She'd like to hear you say that!" sneered the wife.

"I perceive, my dear, that you two love each other very much. But as I was saying, you don't seem to me, Grace, to be much like your own mother—you're more like your stepmother, over there, in some ways. Your mother didn't change. She made good—if you'll let me use some more factory slang—on the old ways, on her own old lines. That's what I call class, breeding, blood, if you like—just plain North American sincerity and simplicity. She didn't pretend, she didn't try to climb where she knew she couldn't go. That's what I call blood!"

"Thank you! You're sincere also, at least."

He seemed not to hear her. He went on. But you've changed, you dropped me. Your head was turned with all this sort of thing. Since these things are true, are you coming back to me?" He young, hinc self, wrenching his eyes away from the cool, dim figure far down the long gallery.

She straightened up suddenly, pale. "Back!—to that? To live in that hole?"

"Yes, just back to that, Grace. It's all I have to offer you. Just that hole."

"I'm not happy here."

"Then why do you stay here? Why don't you come back to me?"

"Because I couldn't be happy over there any more, either! I know it. I admit it. It's got me—I couldn't go back to the old ways, the ways we'd have to live. Why can't you come here—why doesn't Pa give us money enough?"

He turned to her now gravely. "I suppose it's the pace—yes, it's got you, and a lot of others. But I'm not taking that sort of money just yet. And that doesn't answer my question. I've come over to-night to arrive at some understanding about us two. I want to know where I am. There are going to be changes, one way or another."

She turned to him suddenly again. "What's wrong over at that factory, Charley?" she asked. "Why haven't you made good before this? My fa-



"I haven't been bought and paid for, Myself."

ther has been on the point of tearing up things a dozen times! He's sore at you—awfully sore."

"Yes? How do you know I haven't made good?"

"Then why has Pa talked so?"

"For the very good reason that he doesn't know any better than to talk that way. He hasn't got any more sense. He didn't talk that way to me."

"Then you have got it—you've made the discovery—it'll work?"

"Our machines—not only will work, but have been working," said he calmly. "I haven't seen it to tell your father. I'm going to tell you how it works."

that as this was my idea from the first. If I haven't been a competent manager, let him get some one more competent. I'll take what I know with me in my own head. I'm saying to you, his daughter, that I worked out this idea, myself, and all he did was to get the money in the first place for it. For that reason I call this discovery mine, to do with as I like. I haven't been bought and paid for, myself. I don't want money when it costs too much. I've just begun to understand things lately."

"Yes, I've worked it out into practical form," he concluded, as she sat silent. "Your father never did and never can. He's got to come to me, to me, right here. Since you drive me to it, I'll just tell you one thing. I've had this whole thing in my own hands for more than eight months! The company doesn't know it. He doesn't know it, no one knows it. I've been just waiting—to see whether I had a wife or not."

"You never told? Then you've been disloyal, you've been a coward! You took his money—"

"All right," said Halsey suddenly, grimly, "that's all I need. I see, now I know what to do now."

"But you didn't tell father!" she went on fiercely. "And we all know how much has been depending on that factory. Weren't we all in that—didn't we all help, from the very first? Didn't I?"

"Yes, you did, you and your mother," said Halsey. "You've had or will have all you earned. She got divorced from her husband, you may get divorced from me! It's a fine world isn't it? We've all been chasing for more money. Well, here we are! There's a couple over there, here's another one here. Fine, isn't it?"

"But Charley!" She moved toward him and laid a hand on his arm. "You don't stop to reflect on what you are saying! If you have that secret in your hands, why don't you see—don't you see—"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, even Pa will have to come to you! You won't be poor then."

"I should say he would have to come to me!" said Halsey Halsey slowly.

"Yes, I dare say, I dare say, also, I could make a lot of money whether he did or didn't."

"Listen, Charley. He's got every thing, and he wants everything. He's my father, but he doesn't care. He—he sold me out. What do we owe to him and her? What did he do to my mother? I tell you, he thinks of no one but himself. Yet you and I—we found that idea and worked it out, who have it in our own hands now, as you say—you and I have got the whip in our own hands now, it seems to me."

"You talk excellent business sense, Mrs. Halsey. I compliment you. It seems that you begin to discover something in your husband and his possibilities. It's a trifle late, but you delight me!"

"Well, I didn't know, you see," she murmured, pawing at him vaguely, in a fitful and inefficient essay at some coquettish art, grotesque in these conditions.

She was a woman of small feminine charm at best. She sat there now, angular, stiff, unbecomingly, the sort of woman no clothes can make well dressed. Already she had disclosed somewhat of her soul. What appeal, then, physical, emotional, moral could she make to him—a student, a visionary, an idealist—at such a moment? And did there not remain that same cool, distant figure from whom he had so constantly to wrench his eyes—and his heart? Yes; and his heart! Halsey's face was dull red. He was unhappy. The world seemed to him only a hideous nightmare, full of disappointments, injustices, of wrongs that cried aloud for righting. Ah, the comparison now was here, fair and full and unavoidable!

"No, you didn't know," said he slowly. "A lot of people don't. Now let me tell you a few things more. You didn't know that something like a year ago your father told me that he'd make me a present of fifty thousand dollars the day I could run a car from the factory to this place on a charge taken from our own overhead receiver motors."

"A start for a million dollars!" she murmured. "You get that—when you succeed?"

"Yes, that is to say, I could have had that any day in the week these past eight months—if he really has that much left where he can realize on it. He's pretty well spread out."

"Then you have had it—what have you done with the money?"

"I presume I look as though I'd spent or could spend a mere fifty thousand dollars or so, don't I?" was his quiet answer. "No, I didn't have it, and I haven't got it. I'll say this much to you, however, that I ran my little car here to-night on a charge taken out of one of the overhead receiver motors of the International Power company—a motor completed on my own ideas, and by my own hands. It's mine, I tell you—mine."

"Charley!" she caught him by the wrists, with both hands, eagerly. "You can give me the things I've got used to having! I'll go back—oh! I'll go back—we'll go on together! I hate her so—you don't know!"

"That's nice of you, Grace; but you're guessed wrong. I've not got that fifty thousand yet."

"But you can have."

"Yes, I can. What could I buy with it? For one thing, I could buy back my wife!"

"But Charley! We're rich! You've succeeded!"

"No, I am poor, I've failed. I'm just beginning to see how much I've failed!"

"If you don't tell me the truth about this I'll do it myself!" she exclaimed

fiercely. "You've not been loyal—you've taken pay!"

"Your father took his pay from me," was his half-savage answer. "He's been paid enough! As for me, I don't want any more of this sort of pay."

"What are you going to do—you're not going to sell out to some one else?"

"No, my dear, I'm not going to do precisely what you suggested I should do just a moment ago. I'm not going to sell out. I could do that, too, and make more than any fifty thousand. The foreman in our factory, who knows very little, can sell out to-morrow morning for ten thousand dollars, maybe double or triple that now. The watchman on our door can sell out, any of us sell out. But we haven't! If there has been any selling out it has been done by those who built this place here—the piece which you found better than the best home I could offer you."

She sat back stiff, silent, somber. "You—you never mean that you are going to throw this away, then?" she asked at length. "What earthly good will that do? Pa'll have it out of you somehow! I'll—I'm going to tell him!"

"Try it," said Charles Halsey, easily.

She had courage. "Father," she called out. "Pa! Come here—at once!"

Rawn rose suddenly up from his chair at the startling quality in her voice. "What's that, Grace?" he called across the long gallery.

"Come here, I want you! We've got something to say to you."

Halsey sat motionless.

Rawn approached slowly, obviously annoyed. "If it's important—" he began. He had found love-making to his young wife especially delicious this evening, although he mistook her strange silence and preoccupation merely for wifely coyness.

"It is important!" Grace exclaimed; and rising, clutched at his arm.

"Well, then, what's it all about, what's it about? Come, come!"

"Charley's done it, he's got it—he's got the machines finished—over there!" Her voice was almost a scream, hoarse, croaking. She stood bent tense.

"What's that?" demanded Rawn. "What do you mean? Is that the truth, boy?"

"He came over in his car, under International overhead—he told me so, right now," she went on, half hysterically. "You owe him money—a lot, a pile of money—he told me so right now—it's worth more than any fifty thousand. Oh, we're going to have money too. You see!"

Rawn shook off her arm and half flung her back in his chair. "What's this about, Halsey?" he said. "Is it true?"

Halsey nodded calmly, but said nothing.

Rawn half-assaulted him, his large hand on his shoulder. "Did you get the current?" he demanded. "Did you really come over under power out of one of our overheads?"

"Yes, to-night," said Halsey. "Offer before."

"Why, my boy, my boy!" began John Rawn. At once he stood back large, complaisant, jubilant. "My boy!" was all he could say. Not even his soul could at once figure out in full acceptance all the future which these quiet words implied.

"Come!" he explained after a moment, excitedly. "Let's get to the telephone! I want the wires right away! I'll make a million out of this before morning!"

"And write me a check for my fifty thousand to-night!" smiled Halsey.

"Surely I will—I've told you I would—I'll do more than that—I'll make it a twenty-five thousand extra for good measure. I'll have the check taken care of to-morrow at my bank as soon as I can get downtown! Oh things'll begin to happen now, I promise you!"

"I wouldn't be in too big a hurry to use the wire, Mr. Rawn," said Charles Halsey quietly. "And never mind about that check."

"What do you mean? You're going to try to hold me up?"

"No, I'm not going to try to hold you up at all. If there's any question about that possibility, I can get a million to-morrow as easily as I can any fraction of a million to-night, Mr. Rawn, and it's just as well you should know that, perhaps."

"A million?" croaked John Rawn. "You'd sell us out?"

"No, I said, I'm not going to sell you out, Mr. Rawn. And you're not going to buy me out."

"Of course not, of course not," laughed Rawn hoarsely. "You don't understand me."

"You haven't understood me either, Mr. Rawn. Now, what would you do if I told you that after taking my charge for the little car yonder I turned about and dismantled every motor in the shop—destroyed them all—locked up the secret, ended the whole game now—to-night? What would you say to that?"

"By God! I'd kill you!" said John Rawn.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Step-Mother-in-Law.

On this very beautiful evening, in this very beautiful scene—as beautiful as any to be found in all that luxurious portion of a great city representing the flower of a great country's civilization—Graystone Hall was a double stage. At the back of the tall mansion house countless auto-cars passed in brilliant procession, carrying countless men and women, personal evidences of all the ease and luxury that wealth can bring; and of those who passed, the most part

looked in with envy at the tall mansion house beyond the curving lines of shrubbery, brilliantly illuminated now, the picture of beauty and ease, of peace and content. More than one soft-voiced woman murmured, "Beautiful!" as she passed. More than one man, more than one woman, envied the owners of this palace.

"He's awfully gone on his wife, they say," commented one young matron, much as many did. "Not that I see much in her myself—although she seems to have a sort of way about her, after all."

"Lucky beggar!" growled her husband.

"Yes, they're both lucky."

That both Mr. and Mrs. Rawn were lucky seemed to be the consensus of opinion of the procession of those passing at this moment along the great driveway, and hence looking upon the rear stage of the drama then in progress. But they saw no drama. The evening was beautiful. The spot was one of great beauty. Apparently all was peace and content. There was no drama visible, only a stage set for a scene of happiness.

Yet, two hundred yards from the point of this belief, on the stage of the dimly-lighted gallery facing the lake, the comedy of life and ambition, of success and sorrow, moved briskly; moved, indeed, to its appointed and inevitable end.

Rawn's voice, harsh, half animal in its savagery, awakened some sudden kindred savagery in young Halsey's soul. In a flash the spark rose between steel and flint. The accumulated resentment of many days made tinder enough for Halsey now.

"All right, Mr. Rawn," said he, his head dropping, his chin extended. "Go on with the killing now, if you like. I'm going to tell you right here, that sort of talk will do you no good. If you kill me you kill my secret. It isn't yours, and neither you nor any other man is apt to set it going again."

"You hound, you cur!" half sobbed Rawn. His daughter stood, tense, silent, unnoticed at his elbow.

"Thank you. Now, I'll tell you. I dismantled every motor, and I'm never going to build them again for you. I meant every word of what I said. Also I mean this!"

As he spoke he rose and struck Rawn full in the face with his half-clenched hand. The sound of the blow could have been heard the whole length of the gallery—was so heard. An instant later, half roaring, John Rawn closed with the younger man.

The women, plucking at their arms, could do nothing to separate the two, indeed were not noticed in the struggle. As to that, the whole matter was over in an instant. Halsey was far the stronger of the two. He caught the right wrist of Rawn as he smote down clumsily, caught his other wrist in the next instant, and then slowly, by sheer strength, forced him back and down until, at last, he crowded him into the chair which Grace a moment earlier had vacated. The bony fingers of his hand worked havoc on John Rawn's wrist, on his twisted arm.

Halsey was not so long from his college athletics, where he had been well come on several teams. He was younger than Rawn, his body was harder from hard work and abstinence. He was the older man's master.

"Sit down!" he panted. "I don't think you'll do this killing very soon!"

Rawn, for the first time in his life faced a situation which he could not dominate by arrogance and bluster. For the first time in his life he had met another man, body to body, in actual physical encounter; and that man was his master! All at once the consciousness of this flashed through every fiber of him, bodily and mental. He had met a man stronger than himself—yes, stronger both in body and in mind. The consciousness of that later truth also sank deep into his heart. It was a moment of horror for him. He, John Rawn, master of this place, rich, happy, prosperous—he, John Rawn, beaten—subdued—it could not be! Heaven never would permit that!

They all remained tense, silent, motionless, for just half an instant; it seemed to them a long time. Halsey at length straightened and turned toward the door.

"I'm going," said he dully. "Good by, Grace."

Rawn turned, confused, distracted. He cared for no more of the physical testing of this difference. But he saw Success passing in the reviled figure of his son-in-law. "No, no!" he cried. "Jennie—he fooled me—but don't let him go—he'll ruin us, do you hear?"

Halsey was within the tall glass doors and passing toward the front entry. He heard the rustle of skirts back of him and felt a light hand upon his shoulder.

"Well," he began, and turning, faced young Mrs. Rawn!

"I'm sorry," he stammered, "it's disgraceful. I beg your pardon with all my heart. But I couldn't help it. He struck me first with what he said. He threatened me. Let me go. I'll never come back again. I'm sorry—on your account."

"Charles," she said softly, "Charley, wait. Where are you going?"

"To the divorce courts, and then to hell."

"But you mustn't go away like this. I'm sorry, too. Wait!"

Suddenly moved by some swift, irresistible impulse, perhaps born of this unregulated scene where all seemingly control seemed set aside, she put both her white, bare arms about his neck and looked full into his eyes, her own eyes bright. He caught her white wrists in his hands; but did not put away her arms. He stood looking at her, frowning, uncertain. His blood

named.

"It's disgraceful," he said. "I admit it. I can't square it any way in the world. I'm sorry on your account—awfully sorry!" His blood flamed, flamed.

"Listen!" she said, panting, eager, her voice with some strange, new, compelling quality in it, foreign to her as to himself. "You mustn't go. You mustn't ruin the future of us all in just a minute of temper. You mustn't ruin yourself, or—me. Besides, there's Grace!"

"Oh, Grace!"

"But she's your wife."

"Not any longer. She's chosen for herself. She left me and would not come back. I'm going now. I'm on my own from this time."

"Why not?" she asked coolly. "But why wreck ruin on us all? You don't stop to think!"

"Yes, it will set him back pretty badly—" Halsey nodded toward the bowed frame of Rawn, dimly visible, in the gallery's shade, through the tall glass doors.

"Yes," she said slowly, "he's my husband, surely."

"—Who has given you everything?" She nodded, her arms still about his

neck.

"Let me think this out for all of us, Charley. Keep matters as they are until I have time to think—won't you do that much—just that little—for me?"

His hands were still upon her wrists as he looked down upon her from his height, his eyes angry, his face frowning, disturbed. Worn almost to gauntness, tall, sinewy, of a certain distinction in look, as he stood there before her now an ignorant observer might have thought the two lovers, he her lover, not her stepson, she at the least his younger sister, surely not his mother by mixed marriage.

As they stood thus, Rawn turning, saw them through the tall glass door. His face grew eager. "He's not gone," he whispered hoarsely to his daughter, who stood rigid, close at his arm. "She's got him! By Jove! She's a wonder—my wife, my wife—she'll land him yet—she will!"

"Do you see that?" hissed Grace at last, pointing at the door.

"Do I see it—didn't you hear me? Yes, of course I see it!"

"And you'll allow that, between your wife and my husband?"

"Allow it—wife!—why! damn you, girl, what are you talking about—wives and husbands—what's that to do with this? There's many a million dollars up now. I tell you, on those two standing there, you make a move now—say a word—and I'll wring your neck, do you hear?" He caught her by the wrist. She sank into a chair, sobbing blankly.

A moment later the two figures beyond the door stood a trifle apart. The arms of Virginia Rawn dropped from Halsey's neck. She laid a hand upon his arm and, side by side, neither looking out toward the gallery, they drew deeper into the room, behind the shelter of a heavy silken curtain which shut off the view.

It was a beautiful night. The long ladder of the moon lay across the gently rippling lake, which murmured at the foot of Graystone Hall's retaining sea-wall. The scent of flowers was about. It was a scene of peace and beauty and content, John Rawn and his daughter remained upon the gallery for a time.

CHAPTER XV.

The Second Current.

"Charles," said Virginia Rawn, "Charley—" And always her white hand touched his shoulder, his arm, his hand—"You really mustn't go. Believe me, you'll both be sorry to-morrow. You don't know what you're doing! You're only angry now. You'll both be sorry." Her eyes glowed, evaded.

Halsey shook his head. "It's all over, so far as I'm concerned." His eyes glowing, sought here.

"Why, Charley, boy, that's all foolishness. Don't you know how wrong it is to talk in that way? What hasn't Mr. Rawn done for you? And she's your wife!"

"He has done little for me and much for himself," he answered hotly. "As for her, his daughter, she left me for him and what he could give her. She liked this sort of thing rather better than what I could do for her. She weighed it up, one side against the other, and she chose this. Most women would, I suppose."

"Charley, how you talk!" Her voice, reproving, none the less was very gentle, very soft. "One would think you were a regular misanthrope. The next thing, you'll be saying that I was that sort of a woman because I live here. Of course, other things being equal, any woman likes comfort. But

Struck Rawn Full in the Face.

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